



2025 CRESHENDO Impact Report

Building Systems | Shifting Power



Where Migrants Lead Communities Grow

www.creshendo.org

A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Parisa Pirooz

Founder & Executive Director

Dear friends,

Displaced people arrive with skills, expertise, and leadership. The systems meant to serve them were never designed to recognize any of it.

Creshendo was built to change that.

2025 was our first full year. We began as a team of one. By December, 78 volunteers across seven departments had built real infrastructure: governance structures, pilot programs, research publications, and a storytelling practice grounded in consent and dignity. This report is an honest account of what we built, what we tested, and what we learned.

We built governance before growth. Legal registration in the U.S. and Europe, board-level committees, Deloitte pro bono consulting, and Candid's Platinum Seal of Transparency were deliberate prerequisites for responsible scale, not incidental achievements.

We tested programs with discipline. In Portugal, 15 refugee and migrant women completed our entrepreneurship pilot, the highest-turnout class of the term for our partner organization. In Türkiye, we redesigned virtual English instruction to protect

participant privacy before scaling. In the United States, we shifted toward a Train-the-Trainer model because community organizations told us they wanted tools they could own and deliver themselves. Every pivot sharpened the model.

All of it was built by people who chose to show up. An estimated \$750,000 to \$1,000,000 in pro bono and volunteer professional contributions, entirely without paid staff, made this year possible.

In 2026, what we built becomes portable. We are codifying our methodology into curriculum and tools that immigrant-serving organizations can adopt and embed into their own programs. The aim is impact that compounds far beyond the people we reach directly.

Thank you for being part of this first year.

With gratitude,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PP'.

Parisa Pirooz

Founder & Executive Director
Creshendo

2025 AT A GLANCE

78+

Volunteers across 7 departments by December

100+

Total contributors investing time, skills, and lived experience.

66

Mentors and advisors shaping governance, research, storytelling, and integration

\$750K–\$1M

Estimated value of pro bono and volunteer professional contributions.

15

Refugee and migrant women in our first entrepreneurship pilot in Portugal. The highest-turnout class of the term.

3

Integration pilots tested across Portugal, Türkiye, and the United States.

12+

Research articles published through Substack since October.

Platinum

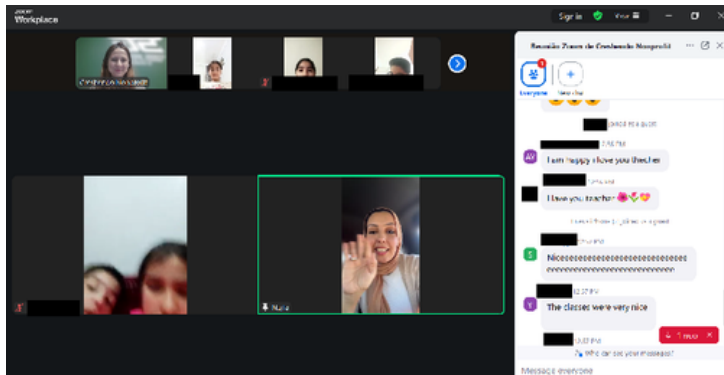
Candid Seal of Transparency. The highest recognition for nonprofit accountability.



WHO WE ARE NOW



Photographer Credit: Susie Byard



“

This workshop has helped me break free from my limitations and start something new with confidence.

Priscillia, Workshop Participant,
Nigerian Migrant

WHO WE ARE NOW

Creshendo builds systems that place decision-making power in the hands of migrant and refugee communities. Our programs are low-barrier, culturally rooted, and designed for community-led implementation across three integrated pillars.

INTEGRATION & ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Scalable learning pathways that strengthen system navigation and economic agency, delivered through virtual workshops, webinars, and Train-the-Trainer models built for long-term community ownership.

STORYTELLING & NARRATIVE POWER

Human-authored storytelling that expands narrative agency and shifts representation away from extractive framing. Every story is produced under consent-centered standards with safety and dignity built into the process.

ADVOCACY, RESEARCH & INSIGHT

Applied research and public insight that illuminate migration dynamics, counter misinformation, and strengthen how institutions understand and respond to displacement.

These pillars work as a system. Integration builds confidence and access. Storytelling shifts perception. Research informs decisions. Together they create durable pathways for belonging, and increasingly, replicable models that other organizations can adopt so impact extends beyond the people we reach directly.

PROGRAMS IN PRACTICE

TESTING | LEARNING | ADAPTING

In 2025, Creshendo ran three deliberate pilots across three regions. Each one clarified how community-led delivery works in practice. Each one generated methodology that travels in 2026.

UNITED STATES: LATINE AMERICAN NEWCOMERS CURRICULUM

We developed a curriculum for Latine American migrants navigating life in the US, covering healthcare, education, housing rights, financial literacy, and immigration basics, drawing on input from instructional designers, psychotherapists, Know Your Rights attorneys, and financial advisors.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Community organizations wanted tools they could own and deliver themselves, not external facilitation.

NEXT

A Train-the-Trainer model is in development for trusted partners, paired with webinar formats that prioritize information-sharing. This defines our 2026 direction: methodology that organizations adopt, embed, and deliver across every program they run.

The infographic is set against a light beige background. At the top right, it says 'Over 3 sessions participants will learn:'. In the center, the title 'Focus on Partners' is displayed, with 'Focus on' in dark blue and 'Partners' in orange. Below the title, the text 'Equip Partners to be ready to implement Creshendo's learning goals within their own organizations' is written in dark blue. To the right of this text are three stacked orange rounded rectangles, each containing a learning goal in white text.

Over 3 sessions participants will learn:

Focus on Partners

Equip Partners to be ready to implement Creshendo's learning goals within their own organizations

- Facilitate safe, trauma-informed learning spaces
- Adapt advocacy strategies to participant needs
- Lead programs that are culturally grounded and participant-led



Portugal Entrepreneurship Workshop (Susie Byard)

PORTUGAL: ENTREPRENEURSHIP PILOT

Partner: The Lisbon Project

Reach: 15 refugee and migrant women

We delivered in-person entrepreneurship training focused on business planning, financial literacy, and confidence-building. The cohort was the highest-turnout class of the term. Participants shaped the sessions throughout, and asked for more when it ended.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Sustained, multi-month support produces deeper skill development than single-cohort delivery.

NEXT

Participant feedback is being incorporated into future cohorts and programming. The model is being refined based on what the first cohort told us worked, what they needed more of, and what they would change.

TÜRKIYE: ENGLISH LEARNING PILOT

Reach: Refugee children, primarily Afghan and Palestinian

Format: Virtual

We piloted virtual English sessions co-led by community educators to strengthen language confidence and educational continuity.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Live virtual instruction for children in precarious circumstances requires stronger privacy safeguards than the original model provided.

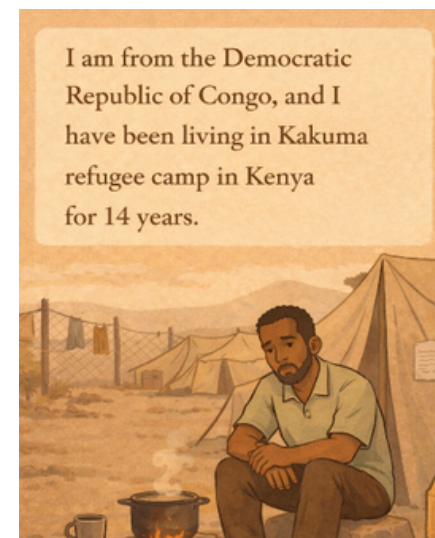
NEXT

Webinar-based formats now share educational content without collecting participant data. Privacy protection comes before program delivery. This redesign informs all future child-facing programming.

Narrative Power

DESIGN ANIMATION BY:

Leonardo S.,
Artist and Animator, Brazilian migrant



NARRATIVE POWER

Storytelling at Creshendo is infrastructure, not content production. It exists to expand narrative agency and embed clear standards for consent, safety, and dignity across everything we publish.

WHAT WE BUILT

- 16 deeply consented stories collected across multiple regions
- 3 original animations produced
- 1 fully translated oral history interview completed
- A Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning framework developed to assess storytelling impact

ANIMATION AS A STRATEGIC MEDIUM

Animation is our primary storytelling medium. It protects participant identity, crosses language barriers, and communicates complex migration experiences with clarity and dignity. Protecting people and preserving their stories work together. Animation makes both possible.

NEXT

Public launch in 2026, sequenced deliberately so consent and safety protocols are fully in place before stories reach public audiences. Podcast episodes, short-form video, and a dedicated story platform follow.

RESEARCH & ADVOCACY

Creshendo's research exists to change what institutions know, what funders prioritize, and what the public understands about displacement.

WHAT WE BUILT

In 2025, we launched a dedicated Research and Advocacy department led by a doctoral candidate, with vetted research assistants across multiple countries.

- 12+ publications since October, including the flagship report *The High Cost of Indifference: Rising Refugee Numbers and Failing Protection Systems*
- 9 host community and humanitarian aid sector interviews completed in Türkiye as part of an Urban Refugee report
- Quantitative fact sheets, blog series, and Notes on specific crises including Ukraine and Rohingya
- Early conversations with CUNY Anthropology opened pathways for student internship placements and academic partnership

KENYA

a case study of the Kakuma Refugee camp



COUNTRY PROFILE

Kenya hosts 304,588 refugees and asylum-seekers in Kakuma Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement as of 30 June 2025.²⁹ Major nationalities include South Sudanese, Congolese, Ethiopians, and Somalis.²⁶ Kenya's Refugee Act 2021 and Shirika Plan (launched March 2025) aim for refugee self-reliance and integration, relying heavily on international support.⁶



Kakuma

In Kakuma, a widowed father of five now stretches a single meal over two days, after U.S. aid cuts triggered a 50 percent reduction in food rations for the camp's 300,000 residents. Children are arriving at hospital wards with severe malnutrition, admissions having more than doubled since the funding freeze began.

Kakuma Refugee Camp, along with the adjacent Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, is one of the world's largest and oldest refugee complexes, located in northwestern Kenya. As of February 2025, it hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Somalia.²⁹ ²⁶ It is characterised by a young population (over 61% are 18 or younger) and a high dependency ratio.



Why Kakuma?

Kakuma serves as a critical case study for understanding the impact of global aid cuts for four reasons:



Scale and Protracted Nature:

Hosting over 300,000 people for decades, Kakuma's size means any change in aid profoundly affects hundreds of thousands.²⁶



High Aid Dependency:

Prior to cuts, the US provided up to 70% of WFP's budget, directly shaping food rations and cash transfers. Healthcare and education were likewise heavily reliant on international support.² ³ ¹⁶ ⁵

Documented Impacts:

Aid reductions have already triggered ration halving, rising malnutrition and child deaths, school closures, economic collapse, and unrest — providing clear, quantifiable evidence of crisis.³ ¹⁸





Testing Integration Models:

Kenya's new "Shirika Plan" aims to integrate refugees into host communities. Ongoing cuts jeopardise this progressive model, exposing wider flaws in global humanitarian strategy.⁶

LOOKING AHEAD

Partnerships, 2026 Direction, and What We're Seeking



Entrepreneurship workshop

Creshendo's progress is shaped by partners, mentors, and supporters who share a commitment to community-led change.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

THE LISBON PROJECT (PORTUGAL)

Co-delivered entrepreneurship training for refugee and migrant women. Long-term curriculum collaboration and a potential licensing partnership are in active conversation.

WORLD EQUITY ASSOCIATION (TÜRKIYE)

Grassroots partner supporting field research and joint grant applications in Istanbul.

EXTERNAL VALIDATION

- Deloitte Step Up Program: Pro bono organizational assessment and operational consulting.
- Candid: Platinum Seal of Transparency
- Senior advisors: Former refugee resettlement, USAID, and UNHCR practitioners
- CUNY Anthropology: Student internship placements and academic partnership in early development

LOOKING AHEAD

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

More than 100 contributors and 66 mentors invested time, expertise, and professional networks in 2025, accelerating partnership development and program expansion across more than 15 countries.

OUR MODEL

Every program, publication, and governance function in 2025 was delivered by 78 active volunteers spanning seven departments and more than 15 countries, with no paid staff. This is proof that community-led infrastructure can be built with discipline, intentionality, and minimal capital.

2026 AND BEYOND

2025 was the year we built the lab. 2026 is when the methodology begins to travel. We are codifying co-creation, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed facilitation, and lived experience into curriculum and tools that immigrant-serving organizations adopt and embed into their own work. The aim is impact that compounds across every community member those organizations reach, with an earned-revenue stream from training that strengthens long-term sustainability.

WHAT WE'RE SEEKING IN 2026

- Operational funding in the \$50–75K range to strengthen core systems
- Institutional fundraising and grant strategy expertise
- Corporate partnerships aligned with dignity-centered, community-led models
- Foundation partners interested in field-building investments rather than direct-service grants



GET INVOLVED

To the communities at the center of this work: your leadership informs every program, story, and insight we produce. This first year was built in your direction and it will continue that way.

To our 178 contributors — 78 active volunteers, 66 mentors, 34 episodic contributors and pro bono advisors — thank you for investing time, expertise, and trust in 2025. To The Lisbon Project, World Equity Association, Deloitte, and the senior practitioners and individual supporters who opened doors and shared networks: your partnership expands what is possible.

The global landscape for migrants and refugees grows more urgent each year. Creshendo exists to meet that urgency with systems, infrastructure, and community ownership. We are building for a world where displaced communities lead their own futures.

JOIN THE WORK

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